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21 March 1980

MEMORANDUM

SOUTH AFRICA: BOTHA'S REFORMS

Prime Minister P.W. Botha is moving at a very slow pace in efforts to find reforms to defuse black dissatisfaction. Black leaders have so far refused to cooperate with him, while ultra-conservative Afrikaners are resisting even minor adjustments in the system.

Prime Minister P.W. Botha, strongly influenced by the leaders of his military forces who believe the greatest security threat to South Africa is internal black discontent, is searching for less restrictive social and economic policies to dampen black restiveness. He has hinted that urban blacks might eventually be allowed a voice within a revised constitutional framework intended to streamline the present system of separate development of the races.

Botha believes that the existing social order cannot be maintained unless a stable black urban population is created. He wants to remove the most irritating aspects of legalized racial discrimination and give urban blacks more control of their own affairs and a greater economic stake in the white areas. Botha hopes to consolidate some of the more fragmented "black homelands" into more viable entities and intends to give Coloreds--persons of mixed blood--and Asians a political role in the white areas in which they live. He envisages a form of common South African citizenship for all races.

Botha has been slow to make good on his promises and so far has managed only minor reforms. The government recently granted black trade unions the right to organize and has removed an anachronistic law that kept blacks from becoming skilled workers.

This memorandum was prepared by [redacted] Africa Division, Office of Political Analysis. It was requested by the National Intelligence Officer for Africa. This paper has not been coordinated. Comments and queries are welcome and may be addressed to Chief, Africa Division, OPA, on [redacted]

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The Prime Minister met with "homeland" leaders in February to set up a joint government-homeland committee to explore common approaches to the South African dilemma. Within days of the Mugabe victory in Rhodesia, Botha took his plans one step forward and called for an undefined "council of states" in which all races would participate. For the first time he included urban blacks in this "council" and couched his announcement in terms abstruse enough to encourage those looking for new directions.

Reactions to the Proposals

Many South Africans are cynical about Botha's proposed reforms. Radical blacks and liberal whites suspect he will do little beyond talking. The ultra-conservative wing of his party has been shocked at the inquiries into some of the underpinnings of apartheid. These politicians fear that even minor changes will open a Pandora's box that could eventually destroy the privileged way of white life. They have gone so far as to threaten to split the party.

The strong-willed Botha, although he will make some tactical adjustments, seems determined to move at his own pace. He will depend on his security forces to keep the blacks under control while seeking to coerce or coopt political leaders of all stripes into following him.

Botha's admonition to white South Africans is "adapt or die" and he clearly means to preside over an adaptive process, but he now has no intention of sharing power with blacks. Any changes Botha makes, however, will over the long run alter the South African political dynamic.



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